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Letters to the Editor

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Freedom and Curiosity

I am not Catholic, yet I received both my masters and doctorate from a major Jesuit university and have taught at a Jesuit university since 1968. I have never felt the need to be more "Catholic" in my pursuit of justice, truth, and knowledge. Yet I have seen recent recurring tensions in higher education that put stress on faculty at Catholic universities to conform to certain predetermined modes of thinking and expression. I sought a Jesuit education and taught at a Jesuit university because I believed in most of the Jesuit ideal and philosophy about the search for truth and justice. As a non-Catholic, I have dedicated my personal and professional life to these ideals.

In today's changing times, however, and with the increased conservative reaction of the church hierarchy and the Vatican, I can no longer assume that academic freedom and intellectual curiosity are always compatible with a Catholic and/or Jesuit university. The mounting realities of societal injustice and the counter pressures from the church that preclude any open discussion of such concerns bring into question the very foundations of higher education's compatibility with Catholicism. Recently, a colleague wrote a commentary in the university newspaper, *The Loyolan*, about a critically important social issue on campus and stated that it was a "non-issue" because "the church will have none of it and for a Catholic school that should be enough." Such expressions are becoming increasingly more strident on Catholic campuses and discourage discourse on critical social issues. In such attempts to regulate open discourse at a Jesuit university, one begins to wonder about the validity of the old adage, "a Catholic university is a contradiction in terms."

The last issue of *Conversations* dealt with the issues of "Helping

Students Make Moral Decisions." All of this has very little meaning if the very foundations of choice to make such decisions are already predetermined. I can only hope that all Jesuit universities will seek truth as an objective and relegate doctrine to the realm of suggestion, guidance, logic, and caring rather than defining truth itself. Doctrine has no place in the academic market place. The freedom of academic inquiry should and must prevail. After all, what is a university? It will be a terrible day if and when Catholic universities view serious student concerns as "non-issues" simply because "the church will have none of it." The very essence of "Jesuit education" is on the line.

Alfred Lightfoot
Professor of Education
Loyola Marymount University

Encourage Collaboration

Father Shelton's article is appropriate and enlightening. I enjoyed reading it and gave copies to my co-workers and friends.

What an opportunity (the right time at the right place) for our Jesuit universities to reach out and work closely with our Jesuit and private high schools. I see very little collaboration between our Jesuit universities and high schools. The model seems to have been set in the 1900s and has not changed. At the same time the high schools should be working closely with our Catholic elementary schools. Again, there is very little effort along these lines.

Our Jesuit universities must reaffirm their Jesuit and Catholic positions in this secular and materialistic era—within the university, and in the outside world as well. Consider editing this timely article to reach a wider, more diverse audience than *Conversations* perhaps reaches.

John J. Stollenwerk
Member, Board of Trustees
Marquette University

Moral Personhood

The debate on the role and function of Jesuit higher education in contemporary America is long overdue. *Conversations* is to be welcomed in this regard, and clearly has an important role to play. The articles in your second issue were most instructive on the key problem now facing Jesuit higher education not so much for what they said, but for what they did not say.

The articles were full of interesting suggestions about the role and function of Jesuit higher education, but they all clearly suffered from not being guided by an explicit account of the nature of the human person. Marvin Berkowitz hit the nail on the head when he said that "a full theory of moral personhood is needed." Since any philosophy of education must be founded ultimately on a theory of the nature of the human person, the priority of Jesuit, and indeed all Christian, schools as they face the future must be to make their view of the human person explicit, and to place it at the heart of the curriculum. Yet it seems that Jesuit schools have been slow to do this.

One might be tempted to think that this reluctance to explicitly assert and defend the Christian view of the human person arises because this view is clearly at odds with current relativistic approaches to theories of the person—and hence to philosophies of education—now sweeping intellectual circles. While this is at least partly true, I think that there is another, more serious reason. It seems to me that Jesuit institutions—and Christian institutions generally—are unsure of exactly what the Christian view of the human person is in modern culture.

Due to the onslaught of liberalism, secularism, and relativism in our institutions of higher learning, the traditional Christian view of the

person has come under attack, and is now struggling with its identity. (This is evident in the fact that some Christian schools hire atheists to their faculties—not because they have embraced a new theory of the person, and hence a new philosophy of education, but because they are *uncertain* about which view of the human person they wish to promote.) How Christian schools respond to this identity crisis will largely determine the future of Christian higher education in America. Until Christian schools begin to address and resolve this problem, they will continue to be unsure of their role. Let me finish with two questions to further the debate: 1) Are there any signs that Christian schools recognize this problem, and are attempting to address it? 2) What is the Christian understanding of the human person in the modern world?

Brendan Sweetman
Assistant Professor of Philosophy
Rockhurst College

Self-Conscious Identity

My association with the Jesuits spans half a century, and I have now completed a full 25 years as a member of the faculty at Fordham University. I wonder whether in recent times, when the Jesuit presence in the academic field is becoming less and less significant, Jesuits are not becoming a bit over self-conscious of their Jesuit identity to the point of being almost sectarian. In Shelton's article, for example, the term "Jesuit" is used almost two dozen times, none of which I found to indicate a specifically Jesuit case, "uni, soli et semper."

Even the six notes, quoted from Arthur McGovern as characteristics that "make Jesuit education distinctive," are common to all educational

institutions run by religious bodies. I find this late Jesuitization of education somewhat strange and unfair to us non-Jesuits, who constitute the overwhelming majority of educationists even in the so-called Jesuit institutions.

I liked the Spring 1992 issue better because it brought out, or at least implied, the essential requirements to make our educational institutions really Catholic: 1) All working in them should work as a team, showing forth the church in miniature; 2) since they are professedly religious, they should bring out a real encounter of the profane and sacred; and, 3) since they are not money-making institutions, they should strive for the highest all-round excellence. But are these realized, or even aimed at, in the actual Jesuit institutions? The whole effort now seems to be focussed on asserting the "ownership" of the Jesuits! As for academic excellence, there is not a single Jesuit or Catholic university among the best 25 universities of the United States! Is this not a shame?

I cannot say that I like very much Shelton's article on ethics. I found it quite inadequate. I like the experien-

tial and psychological approach to morals, but the substance of the article simply misses the point. It is a good illustration of Alasdair MacIntyre's complaint that the modern way of doing ethics is like doing science after having burned all scientific books and killed all scientists. Shelton's ethics is extremely individualistic, moral responsibility is simply "personal integrity...the freedom to choose behaviors which address one's fidelity to one's core values."

I am not writing to discourage the timely venture you have started, but to plead that its scope be widened to deserve the active involvement of all educationists who face the same problems and have the same concerns as the Jesuits.

Rev. John B. Chethimattam CMI
Professor of Philosophy
Fordham University

Informal Power

I want to say a personal "thank you" for the Fall 1992 issue of *Conversations*. With all of our concern over the institutional, programmatic, and curricular dimensions of Jesuit-inspired teaching, too often too little of our attention seems to go to those informal moments which are probably most telling in transmitting to our students the "binding" message that we care about them not only as students but also with respect to the integral worth and happiness of their lives. Time and again I have seen that message unlock both startling depths of energy and a wonderful openness to higher values. This issue of *Conversations* reminds us of many principles as we engage in this under-emphasized but absolutely important dimension of our work.

Arthur L. Fisher
Associate Professor of History
Seattle University

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